

WASHINGTON POST
15 December 1985

MARY McGRORY

Paying Undue Homage

IT WAS A week for kissing the hem in Washington.

Several prominent people who had been badly treated paid tribute to their tormentors in public. It was a reminder that in the shifting sands of the capital city, one rock stands firm: Honest anger is a luxury not permitted those who wish to ply the corridors of power.

On Monday, Robert C. McFarlane, the president's departing national security adviser, who for months has been telling his friends he couldn't stand the way Donald Regan, the White House chief of staff, was shouldering him aside and acing him out, sprang to Regan's defense.

A facetious question about someone with "throw-weight problems" — a reference to Regan's aspersions on the interests of women — was put to McFarlane at the Foreign Policy Association. McFarlane began to praise the man who had made his life miserable.

"I think Don Regan has gotten a bad rap," he said earnestly. He went on to say how successfully the expansionist chief of staff had performed across a broad panoply of problems. Regan is no sexist, he volunteered, but aware and respectful of contributions made by women in government.

It was above and beyond the call of duty — but perhaps not of discretion. McFarlane wishes to burn no bridges. If he is to be a high-powered foreign-policy consultant, he must not be seen as at odds with the man who controls the traffic flow into the Oval Office.

The next day, we heard from departing Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler, another public official with Regan's knife in her back. Heckler had been serving happily in her Cabinet job when, found deficient in picking up Regan's "signals," she was advised that she was going to be sent to Ireland as ambassador. She had tears in her eyes the day that Ronald Reagan called her sacking

"a promotion," a notion so widely discounted that he felt called upon to insist that the land of his ancestors and hers was "not a dumping ground."

Heckler is an object of much sympathy among her erstwhile sisters in the House, and the Congressional Women's Caucus held a farewell party for her. Heckler did not forget on which side her bread was buttered.

"I suggest a toast to the enlightened man who made this career possible for me, President Reagan," she said, eagerly obliterating 16 years in Congress in her rush to pay her respects to the boss of the man who did her in, thus proving again that in this city, one must never forget the hand that feeds.

Wednesday night, the trend peaked. At the Sheraton-Washington Hotel, Vice President George Bush was the

principal praiser at a dinner posthumously honoring William Loeb, the terrible-tongued publisher of the Manchester Union-Leader, a paper of such vitriol and distortion that for many it constitutes a reason for disqualifying New Hampshire as the first primary state. Bush was a favorite target of Loeb's famous front-page, kick-in-the stomach editorials.

Bush's genuflection was a matter of enormous interest to the right-wing, to whom Loeb was the moral equivalent of a Joseph Pulitzer; the press and the conservative mandarins gathered in great numbers to see how deep he would bend the knee to get the nomination.

This exercise in self-abasement was organized by Max Hugel, a New Hampshire entrepreneur, who was briefly, and stormily, deputy director of the CIA, and who now heads something called "Project 88: Americans for the Reagan Agenda."

Tory celebrities abounded: Eagle Forum maven Phyllis Schlafly, evangelist Pat Robertson, CIA director William J. Casey, Howard Phillips, Richard Viguerie and Patrick

Buchanan, who got by far the biggest hand and the only cheers.

Rep. Jack Kemp, who commutes to the Granite State these days, was billed among the hosts, but did not show: He was detained on the Hill, where he was busy undermining the Reagan agenda for tax reform. He sent his wife. So did Sen. Bob Dole, another aspirant, and Alexander Haig, who is toying with a candidacy.

After a laudatory film which showed Loeb as a sentimental, soft-hearted, although "strong-minded and strong-willed" publisher, Donald Regan gave Bush a patronizing introduction as "a most effective and loyal vice-president."

Bush did not spare the lashes in his vigorous self-flagellation. He humorously recounted the numerous editorial insults heaped on him by Loeb. He went on to quote worse things said of him by more liberal observers.

And then, in a strong "I-am-not-a-wimp" initiative, he told of his wartime experiences as a Navy pilot. He called upon his wife Barbara, to vouch for his enthusiasm for country-and-western music. He carried it off. The right-wingers felt their boots had been appropriately licked. Bush should just remember that they never get enough of it.

Mary McGrory is a Washington Post columnist.